Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages | Commissariat aux langues officielles

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Federal services in both official languages in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut: A disturbing report

The Commissioner of Official Languages, Dr. Dyane Adam, today published a follow-up report on federal offices designated to provide service in both official languages in the Northwest Territories, which included Nunavut at the time. The report is one of a series of follow-ups that the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages undertook in 1996 in each province and territory to evaluate the progress achieved since the overall study of 1994 on the delivery of services in both official languages. With this report on the Northwest Territories, the Commissioner has reached the tenth of the series of thirteen follow-up studies.

The follow-up looked at 21 of the 39 offices designated to offer bilingual services (out of a total of 164 federal offices). The report shows that despite the commitments made by federal institutions following the 1994 study, the results achieved are generally unsatisfactory. Five years after the initial study, the Commissioner notes that the ability to offer services in both official languages remained inadequate in 50% of the offices visited, the same percentage as in 1994. "This situation must change because Francophones in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are entitled to receive quality services in their language", insisted Dr. Adam.

The follow-up showed that signage, directions and printed material are generally available in both official languages. However, there has been little progress since 1994 as regards a two-language greeting on the telephone and still less as regards the greeting in person. The figure in the first case has risen from 50% to 55%, and in the second, fallen from 17% to 0%. "The absence of active offer by employees assigned to provide client service discourages French-speaking clients in the Northwest Territories from exercising their language rights", noted the Commissioner.

A number of positive points emerge. The study shows that managers and employees have a better understanding of their obligations in terms of official languages, however the Commissioner regrets the fact that employees do not implement the directives they receive. It must be noted that some institutions have established contacts with French-language organizations, and this will help them in understanding the needs of the French-speaking community. A few offices have a good record in terms of client services, such as the Canada Business Development Bank and Canadian Heritage. Others also did well, but they provide service by means of a 1-800 line for the entire country.

In view of these results, the Commissioner asks the institutions to follow up as soon as possible on the commitments they made in response to the report, so as to rectify the deficiencies identified. The commitments made by the institutions are included in the report.

Over the next few months, the Commissioner will publish follow-up studies on the quality of services in both official languages offered by designated federal offices in Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario.

These reports will be followed by a summary report which will analyze the overall situation across the country.

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Information

Commissioner's Representatives

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